2019
Social Campus Report
A global report on higher education social media usage
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Overview

It has been two years since Hootsuite conducted the first Social Campus survey. A lot has changed in the world of social since then. Data privacy scandals forced social networks to rethink user privacy and security. User behavior shifted from public social engagement toward private engagement via 1:1 messaging apps. And the continued decline of organic reach created a greater demand for paid advertising.

Despite the shifting landscape, social media remains a key part of the fabric of higher education. Today, social media touches every part of the student journey. But while schools are excelling on social in areas like student engagement and service delivery, they’re not effectively measuring the true impact of social media in areas like student enrollment, student retention, alumni engagement, and fundraising.

The Social Campus Report 2019 is based on a global survey of 530 social media leaders in higher education around the world, as well as in-depth interviews with five leading higher education institutions. It examines the state of the Social Campus today and identifies opportunities for greater operational efficiency so schools can measure and prove the value of social across the entire student journey. The report also explores five trends to help higher education institutions remain relevant to their digital-first audience.
Summary of findings

Social media use is now ubiquitous, with 98% of schools using it across campus. And while social is incorporated into every step of the student journey—from marketing and recruitment through to student engagement and alumni relations—not all areas of campus are measuring tangible results.

While social media is seen as a strategic area of focus by over two-thirds (68%) of executive teams, social media leaders are struggling to demonstrate its strategic value, putting further investment and expansion at risk.

To address this organizational inefficiency, schools must improve cross-departmental collaboration and integrate social analytics data with CRM and other critical business applications.

In addition to enhancing the operational side of the Social Campus, schools also have a responsibility to stay on the cutting edge of social innovation. Their audience is made up of digital natives, after all. With student engagement rates declining across Facebook and Twitter, investment in paid social is increasing. Innovative schools are also experimenting with new content formats, personalization, and AI to offer new and efficient ways to engage students and enhance every aspect of the student journey.
Demographics

NA / LATAM 71%
EMEA 21%
APAC 8%

RESPONDENT ROLE
Executive leadership 5%
Marketing / Communication 76%
Professor / Lecturer / Faculty member 10%
Student 3%
Other 6%

NUMBER OF STUDENTS
< 2,500 students 28%
2,500 to 4,999 students 15%
5,000 to 9,999 students 11%
10,000 to 14,999 students 11%
> 15,000 students 35%

Methodology
The Hootsuite Social Campus survey was fielded from March 14–24, 2019. Almost 50,000 social media users from Hootsuite’s database were invited to participate. Qualifying respondents work for a higher education institution and are responsible for or have oversight into social media strategy and/or execution.

This report summarizes complete responses from 530 individuals on their use of social media. It is complemented by interviews conducted with five social media leaders at the following higher education institutions:

Georgia State University, Georgia, USA
Purdue University, Indiana, USA
University of Manchester, Manchester, UK
University of St Andrews, Fife, Scotland
University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada
The Social Campus in 2019

Higher education institutions of all shapes and sizes are using social media to connect with students along the student journey.

While use cases for social have not changed from 2017 to 2019, usage is up overall at every point along the student journey. From marketing to prospective students to guiding students through the enrollment process, engaging them on campus, and connecting with them as alumni, higher education professionals are using social as the key engagement touchpoint throughout the campus experience.

98% of higher education institutions surveyed are using social media.

THERE IS HIGH ADOPTION OF SOCIAL ON EVERY POINT OF THE STUDENT JOURNEY

**AWARENESS**
- 82% run targeted campaigns to build awareness
- 66% listen and monitor public sentiment

**RECRUITMENT**
- 77% run targeted campaigns to attract prospective students

**ENGAGEMENT**
- 94% share school news and promote events
- 57% respond to customer service inquiries (e.g., health, parking, housing, facilities, etc.)
- 62% manage crisis communications

**ADVOCACY**
- 72% improve alumni engagement
- 72% promote alumni events
- 47% conduct fundraising campaigns
The strategic role of social media is fully established on the Social Campus

It’s widely accepted that social media is a strategic area of focus campus-wide, with 68% of executive teams bought in and 64% of schools integrating social into their strategic plan and institutional mission.

However, the top three social media goals remain unchanged for organizations since 2017. One, defining a clear social media strategy. Two, monitoring social activity to better understand students. Three, determining the return on investment from social activities.

**The Top Three Social Media Goals Are Unchanged From 2017**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defining a clear social media strategy and objectives</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring social media activity (to better understand students, faculty, and alumni)</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determining ROI of social media efforts</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinating with other units on a campus-wide social strategy</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*What are your social media goals for the next 12 months? (Select all that apply)*
Addressing real business challenges—but not measuring impact

While schools are using social media to address business challenges, they are not realizing the benefits across the entire student journey.

For example, in 2019 declining enrollments moved into third place as a top factor driving the adoption of social media across campus. Despite this, only 33% of schools said they see a direct impact on student applications from social media activity. One reason they are not seeing a direct impact is that they have no way to measure it.

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**DECLINING ENROLLMENTS IS ONE OF THE TOP THREE FACTORS FOR SOCIAL ADOPTION**

```
Student use of social creating more demand for social engagement
Increased competition from other education providers
Declining undergraduate enrollments forcing new recruitment approaches
Improve the institute ranking
Monitoring and managing crisis situation / communication
Greater scrutiny on the value of education
Growth in international student enrollments pushing more focus on virtual outreach to new markets
```


Outlined below are several external factors that may be driving your institution’s use of social media. Please rank the following factors, where 1 corresponds to the most important factor, 2 the second most important factor, and so on.
However, there is an overall improvement in the benefits that schools are realizing since 2017. While schools are seeing the greatest success in areas like brand awareness (78%) and student engagement (68%), the benefits of social are still inadequately realized at other strategic points in the student journey like increasing student applications (33%) and alumni fundraising (21%).

One of the biggest barriers to properly measuring the ROI of social is a lack of CRM integrations. Only 25% of schools have social media integrated with their CRM systems. Without a CRM integration, three-quarters of schools do not have the ability to track attribution of student applications or alumni fundraising back to social media activity.

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**INCREASING STUDENT APPLICATIONS AND FUNDRAISING EFFORTS ARE INADEQUATELY REALIZED BENEFITS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased brand awareness</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better engagement with students</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved brand perception</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better information sharing across campus</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved alumni engagement</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevent and manage crisis more effectively</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased number of student applications</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased success of fundraising efforts</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased quality of student applications</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Which, if any, of the following benefits has your institution realized from leveraging social media? (Select all that apply)
Optimizing the Social Campus in 2020

To create operational efficiencies and remain innovative, higher education organizations must collaborate better across departments, gain executive support to fix resource and budget constraints, and better demonstrate the value of social media investments with proper measurement and goal setting.

While some progress has been made in these areas since 2017, the top challenges identified in 2019 still include lack of cross-departmental collaboration (57%), lack of social media resources (46%), budget (55%), and the inability to measure return on investment (42%).

SOCIAL CAMPUS CHALLENGES IN 2019

- Lack of cross-departmental collaboration: 57% (2019) vs. 52% (2017)
- Lack of team member for social media management / execution: 46% (2019)
- Skills gap / lack of social media training: 45% (2019) vs. 55% (2017)
- Unsure how to measure the ROI of social media: 42% (2019) vs. 41% (2017)
- Lack of centralized ownership: 33% (2019) vs. 25% (2017)
- Lack of wide adoption across campus: 25% (2019) vs. 27% (2017)

Hub-and-spoke model for greater collaboration

While most schools (75%) allow individual teams the autonomy to manage their own social media accounts, this autonomy poses a challenge to cross-campus collaboration—one of the top three strategic goals in 2019 is the development of a campus-wide social media strategy (45%).

On one hand, social media teams have limited resources to dedicate to social, while on the other, there is an average of 46 people across campus actively using social media. These resources can be mobilized more effectively with a hub-and-spoke model of social media management.

A hub-and-spoke model involves coordination, governance, and training—delivered by a central social media team—and regular check-ins with those responsible for social media across campus. The Universities of Manchester and Waterloo, both Hootsuite customers, have established some best practices in this area.
According to Alistair Beech, Senior Social Media Coordinator at the University of Manchester, marketing, communications, and social media functions are distributed across each faculty. The central team brings together a committee of social media leaders from across the university on a regular cadence to discuss best practices, training, and social media policies. Committee members act as ambassadors and are responsible for governing the use of social media and ensuring brand consistency in their respective areas of the university.

“Our central team builds best practice guidelines and provides training but our faculties are self-managed so they have autonomy over their messaging and content.”

Alistair Beech  
Senior Social Media Coordinator  
University of Manchester

Similarly, the University of Waterloo has a central hub for social media that enables 125 people across campus to manage their own channels securely through Hootsuite. To request a new social media account, staff members or students must complete an intake form and demonstrate a good business case.

According to Iva Badjari, Associate Director, Digital Communications at the University of Waterloo, “Our central team keeps everyone organized using Hootsuite—no social handles are permitted to exist outside of that so we can ensure that everything is secure and we can monitor activity to ensure all handles serve a purpose.”

Social media accounts are audited by the central team every year and decommissioned if activity is low. Like the University of Manchester, the University of Waterloo hosts two monthly in-person roundtables for faculty communicators to collaborate, share information and content, and discuss processes.

“No social handles are permitted to exist outside of Hootsuite so we can ensure that everything is secure and we can monitor activity to ensure all handles serve a purpose.”

Iva Badjari  
Associate Director, Digital Communications  
University of Waterloo
Proving return on investment to maintain and grow social media budgets

Engagement remains the top metric for success among social media managers in higher education. Engagement is the most readily available data and ties neatly back to the area of the organization that social media managers can control—content success.

Without attribution expertise or the right technologies in place, it’s difficult to attribute social activity to tangible business outcomes like student recruitment and enrollment or alumni fundraising. As a result, social media managers are challenged with justifying budget for activities that can’t be clearly mapped back to university goals.

According to one Hootsuite customer—Terry Coniglio, Director of Content Strategy at Georgia State University—shifting perspectives from a social-first approach to a university-first approach helped her team reset their goals around social. Terry said, “We shifted our social strategy from content creation based on the social audience and trends. We aligned our content strategy to the goals of the university’s strategic plan and university identity and thought about how the content could hit on key points about who we are. We’re marketing Georgia State with our authentic content. That’s why this has been so successful and has resonated with the university’s leadership.”

“We aligned our content strategy to the goals of the university’s strategic plan and university identity and thought about how the content could hit on key points about who we are. We’re marketing Georgia State with our authentic content. That’s why this has been so successful and has resonated with the university’s leadership.”

Terry Coniglio  
Director of Content Strategy  
Georgia State University

Determining return on investment was one of the top three goals for social media managers in higher education (58%). In order to prove that social media is impacting business outcomes like student recruitment and enrollment, higher education organizations must make a concerted effort to integrate social media data with a centralized CRM system.
Purdue University unifies the student journey on social

Purdue University is unifying their alumni journey by integrating social media with their centralized Salesforce CRM application.

“Our end goal is to tie all of our data together—email, social, chat—to get a full picture of the student journey, from enrolling in the school to staying connected as alumni. We’re all about the concept of lifelong learning so maintaining contact with our alumni community is a huge priority for us. This includes alumni from the physical university as well as our 130,000 distance learning alumni from Purdue University Global.”

Martin Sickafoose
Vice President of Digital Marketing
Purdue Alumni Association

Purdue University runs the most successful single-day annual university fundraising drives in the world—the Purdue Day of Giving. In 2018, the school raised $37.6 million (bringing the total raised since 2014 to $105 million). Social media plays a huge role in the fundraising campaign, so tracking this activity in CRM will allow Purdue to attribute social activity to actual funds raised. This will be a powerful argument for greater investment in social media resources.
Social Campus
Trends to watch

In addition to improving the operational efficiency of social media on campus, schools have a responsibility to serve the demands of their audience—digital-first students. To do this, they must remain innovative and stay on the cutting edge of social trends. The Social Campus research uncovered five exciting trends to watch in 2020.

1. Greater demand for 1:1 messaging has schools exploring AI

Messaging is one of the few things people do more than social networking. And while demand for 1:1 messaging is not unique to higher education, it is pronounced there. Research found that the use of messaging grew 14% from 37% in 2017 to 51% in 2019.

As schools adjust their communications strategies to meet the demand for more personalized engagement, they’re turning to AI to scale their approach.

The University of Manchester is using a messaging bot to answer common timetabling queries and Georgia State University is using AI and chatbots to guide prospective students through the admissions process.
The University of Manchester uses AI to answer students’ timetabling queries

The University of Manchester was the first UK university to launch a bespoke chatbot app to assist students with timetabling queries.1 The Timetabling Office developed the chatbot to assist students via messaging apps like Facebook Messenger.

The chatbot lets students ask questions like “where is the Beyer building?”, “how do I get to University Place?” or “when is the next lecture for course CHEN10192?”

Georgia State chatbot reduces “summer melt” by 22%

According to a study by the Harvard University Center for Education Policy Research2, anywhere from 10% to 40% of prospective college students become so discouraged by the number of hurdles they face through the application process that they “melt” and fail to attend in the fall.

Many of those students are first-generation college students who don’t have the support of family to help guide them through the process.

To address this, Georgia State University used the AdmitHub conversational platform to develop an AI-enhanced chatbot called Pounce, which answers questions and guides students through the application process. In the first year alone, they saw a 22% reduction in summer melt.3

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3 Georgia State University. 2018. Reducing Summer Melt.
Declining engagement means paid advertising budgets are increasing

To address declining engagement levels on Facebook and Twitter, more than half of institutions (58%) are planning to increase paid advertising in 2020. Schools are also increasing spend on headcount and technology.

The majority of the increased ad spend is going toward targeted campaigns to attract prospective students—up 12% from 2017. Overwhelmingly, Facebook and Instagram were selected as the top platforms for advertising spend in higher education.

At the University of Manchester, paid social is high on the list of requests that come to the central social media team. The central team highlights the importance of paid ads in their regular training sessions so social media managers at the university are aware of the power of ads in getting their message out to the right audience.
3 Student-generated content boosts organic engagement

Since 2017, Instagram has grown in importance in higher education. Conversely, Snapchat usage has declined. The main reasons for the decline of Snapchat in higher education (cited by the University of Manchester, the University of Waterloo, and Purdue University) are the inability to measure engagement and the fact that more students are moving away from Snapchat and toward Instagram.

Social Networks in Use on the Social Campus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Network</th>
<th>2019 Percentage</th>
<th>2017 Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snapchat</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What social networks is your institution using? (Select all that apply)

Students are taking over social media handles in higher education more than before—an increase of 11% since 2017. Many schools are seeing engagement gains from the low-cost, authentic videos and Stories that students produce.
At the University of St Andrews in Scotland, Instagram efforts are entirely student-led. While the university’s central social media team uses Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn to showcase research initiatives and innovations, the Instagram account is all about the students.

### COMMON SOCIAL TACTICS IN USE ON THE SOCIAL CAMPUS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Tactic</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Video content</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid advertising on social</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live engagement during events (webinars, sports events, etc.)</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social listening to measure sentiment</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media student takeovers</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live social chats / AMA (Ask Me Anything sessions)</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media advocacy initiatives</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media faculty takeovers</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chatbots (AI)</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Base:** 530 (2019) & 423 (2017) professionals in higher education with responsibility for social media.

Which of the following social media tactics does your institution use? (Select all that apply)
According to John Chapman, Social Media and Web Content Editor at the University of St Andrews, the school has seen a huge increase in engagement since handing Instagram over to the students. He said, “Guest users publish funny day-in-the-life and ‘Ask me Anything’ videos and stories and they’re a huge hit. It makes sense—students relate to students, they want to hear from people like them, and they’re far more likely to engage as a result.”

Similarly, the University of Manchester uses Instagram stories to showcase the great work being done by different schools on campus through video and stories. For example, the sports department uses the channel to promote health-focused initiatives, challenges, and awareness campaigns.
4 Personalization lifts advocacy initiatives

Declining student engagement on social channels like Facebook and Twitter has schools experimenting with personalization to attract students’ attention and encourage sharing and advocacy at several points on the student journey—enrollment, graduation, and alumni fundraising.

Georgia State welcomes new students with personalized videos to guide them through the enrollment and registration process.

The University of Manchester says farewell to students with personalized graduation videos.

Purdue University sends personal thank-you notes to donors on Instagram on the Day of Giving.
Centralized content and processes can empower everyone on campus

Despite the ubiquity of social media, one quarter of schools surveyed said there is still a lack of wide adoption across campus.

Georgia State University, which ranks as one of the most innovative institutions in the US, invested in designing and implementing a social media strategy that would scale across their institution. They centralized content and processes to empower teams and individuals across campus with easy-to-share quality content. For the last two years, Georgia State’s #TheStateWay campaign has been a vibrant channel for sharing news, insights, and stories—communicating to audiences a unique spirit that is changing the higher education landscape. Georgia State enjoys a 90% social media adoption rate among university executives today.4

Next steps

Hootsuite helps higher education organizations around the world manage their social media, connect with students, launch ad campaigns, and measure ROI.

Speak to an expert about our integrated platform used by leading higher education organizations, including those mentioned in this study—Georgia State University, Purdue University, University of Manchester, University of St Andrews, and University of Waterloo.

Request a demo or learn more at hootsuite.com/higher-ed

4 Hootsuite. 2019. How Georgia State University Built a Global Community of Brand Advocates.